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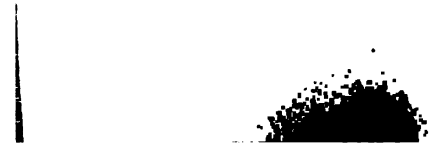

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Mr William Prynn

his Defence of

STAGE-PLAYS,

OR

A Retractation of a

former Book of his called

Histrio-Mastix.

London, printed in the Year 1649.

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(*100 copies for private distribution*)

REPRINTED
THE LITERARY COLLECTOR PRESS
Greenwich, Conn., 1905
25 copies on Japanese Vellum
125 copies on Enfield Paper

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Mr William Prynn

his Defence of

STAGE-PLAYES.

Or a Retractation of a former book of his called *Histrio-Mastix.*

WHereas this Tyrannicall, abominable lewd, schismaticall, hæretical Army, are bent in a wilfull and forcible way to destroy all Lawfull Goverment; and to compasse those ends, have lately infringed the Priviledges of Parliament, being a thing contrary to all Customes, Laws, Statutes, Examples, Precedents and precepts, as I have at large discoursed in my last book, and brought a whole Army of proofs against them; (*Origen, Philo Iud. Tertullian,*

 Lactantius,

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Lactantius, Eusebius, Ambrose, Gregory, Augustine, Cyprian, Hieronimus, Basilius, Nazianzen, Athanasius, Chrysostomus, Barnard, Tho. Aquinas, Hook Eccl. Calvin,) for it is easie to be proved by the Fathers, and all Christian Writers, That Authority Lawfull is to be obeyed; I cannot yet be silent in a thing of so great moment; but must make known to the People of *England*, and to all the world, to all sorts of men, nay, to men and Angels, those exorbitant courses in which they persist still: It is not long ago, and therefore too lately to be so soon forgotten, how Colonel *Pride* and diverse others of the Army did stop the Members of Parliament from doing of their duty in a most forcible, unlawful, seditious, mutinous, unexampled and unparraleld way; among that multitude of faithfull Patriots and Parliament-men, they seized also upon me, carryed me away by force, and restrained me of my liberty, for no offence but onely endeavouring to discharge my conscience, which is a thing I shall alwayes do, without fearing any man, any arm of flesh, any Potentacie, Prelacy, superintendency, or power terrestriall or internall; and have done, witnesse my often sufferings from the Court, from the Lords, and from the Prelates, when I durst maintain the truth without fear of either King, Lords, Prelates, Presbyterians or Independents. But I let this passe, having already at large written about

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about that injurie; but now there is another fresh occasion, which hath incited my just indignation against this wicked and Tyrannicall Army, they did lately in a most inhumane, cruell, rough and barbarous manner take away the poor Players from their Houses, being met there to discharge the duty of their callings; as if this army were fully bent, and most trayterously and maliciously set to put down and depresse all the King's Friends, not onely in Parliament but in the very Theaters; they have no care of Covenant or any thing else, but being most fædifragous would deprive the King of all his Rights and Prerogatives, which they are bound by the Covenant to maintain; and was it not alwayes an allowed Prerogative to Kings and great Princes to have Players for their Recreations, which I am verily perswaded they are as little able to answer for considering their Covenant, as for their other illegal action towards us in the Parliament.

But now I know what the malicious, ill-spoken, clamorous and obstreperous people will object against me; namely, That I did once write a Book against Stage-plays, called *Histrio-mastix*, for which I underwent a cruel censure in the Starchamber. I confesse it is true, I did once so, but it was when I had not so cleer a light as now I have; and it is no disparagement for any man to alter his judgement upon better information, besides it was done long ago

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ago, and when the King (whose vertues I did not then so perfectly understand) governed without any controul, which was the time that I took the better to shew my conscience and courage, to oppose that power which was the highest, but had I truly known the King, I must confesse with sorrow, I should not have compared him to *Nero* the most wicked of the Roman Emperors (as I did in that book) for loving of Stage-playes; nor have given the Queen those bitter and cruell words of whore and strumpet, for playing a part in Mr. *Montagues* Pastorall, but I have suffered for that long ago, and am now ready to suffer, in discharging my conscience, under what power so ever is now set up to Martyr me.

But that Playes are lawfull things, and are to be allowed as recreations for honest men, I need not quote many Authors to prove it, it will serve the turn, if I do but tell you that many good men have been Authors of Comædies and Trægedies; and many of them Christians (*Buchanon*, *Grotius*, *Hensius*, *Barclaius*,) there are also many ancient Comædians and Tragædians among the Heathen, which were men of no ill note, (*Menander*, *Soploches*, *Aeschylus*, *Euripides*, *Aristoplanes*, *Terentius*, *Plautus*, *Seneca*) and whereas I did quote many Fathers and other Ancient Christian Authors against Stage-playes, I confess I was not perfectly advised in all the circumstances belonging to them, being not such Plays

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Plays as were written and acted in *England* of late, for the Recreation of our most gracious King and Queen, and many of their best friends: and therefore distinctions ought to be used in those cases; for all Plays are not of one nature; and vertues, magnanimity, chastity, sobriety, temperance, justice, modesty, goodness, *&c.* may be taught in Plays, and many men have been made the better for seeing of them. And whereas divers objections have been made against Stage-playes, for that many of them are profane, many of them have swearing and blaspheming in them, many of them have cozening, cheating, legedemain, fraud, deceit, jugglings, impostures, and other lewd things, which may teach young people evil things, and corrupt good maners, I do also myself speak against such Playes, and will not at all maintain them, much lesse would I be content to suffer in such a cause as that were. But that honest Playes may be tolerated, and not to be forbidden by any Army under heaven, I do maintain before all the world. It is true that some have objected against Stage-Playes, that there is an unlawful thing used in them, which is against a place in the Old Testament (and is urged by Dr *Reinolds* and other reverend men against Playes) namely, that men or boyes do wear the apparel of women, being expressly forbidden in the Text. To this I answer, first, that if this be all, it is a fault may be easily amended;

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amended; and we may do in *England*, as they do in *France*, *Italy*, *Spain*, and other places, where those which play womens parts, are women indeed; and so there no offence against that place. But then again it may be objected, That that is more wanton then if boyes acted womens parts, and more apt to ingender loose thoughts; and I myself am of that opinion, And therefore do desire rather to maintain that tenent, That mens putting on of womens apparel is not again the Scripture in a plain and ordinary sence; for it had a farther meaning, as ond of the Rabbies affirms; for it was a custom of men in those days, when they prayed to *Rimmon* who was *Mars*, that they put on womens apparel to seem like to *Venus*, and so to please that false god; and women, when they prayed to *Ashtarosh* who was *Venus*, put on mens apparel, to seem like to *Mars*, and so to please that goddesse. And therefore I think, because this scruple is satisfied, I may conclude that good Plays, which are not profane, lewd, bad, blasphemous or ungodly, may be acted; and that this wicked and tyrannical Army ought not to hinder, to impede, let, prohibit, or forbid the acting of them; which I dare maintain to all the world; for I was never afrayd to suffer in a good cause.

FINIS.

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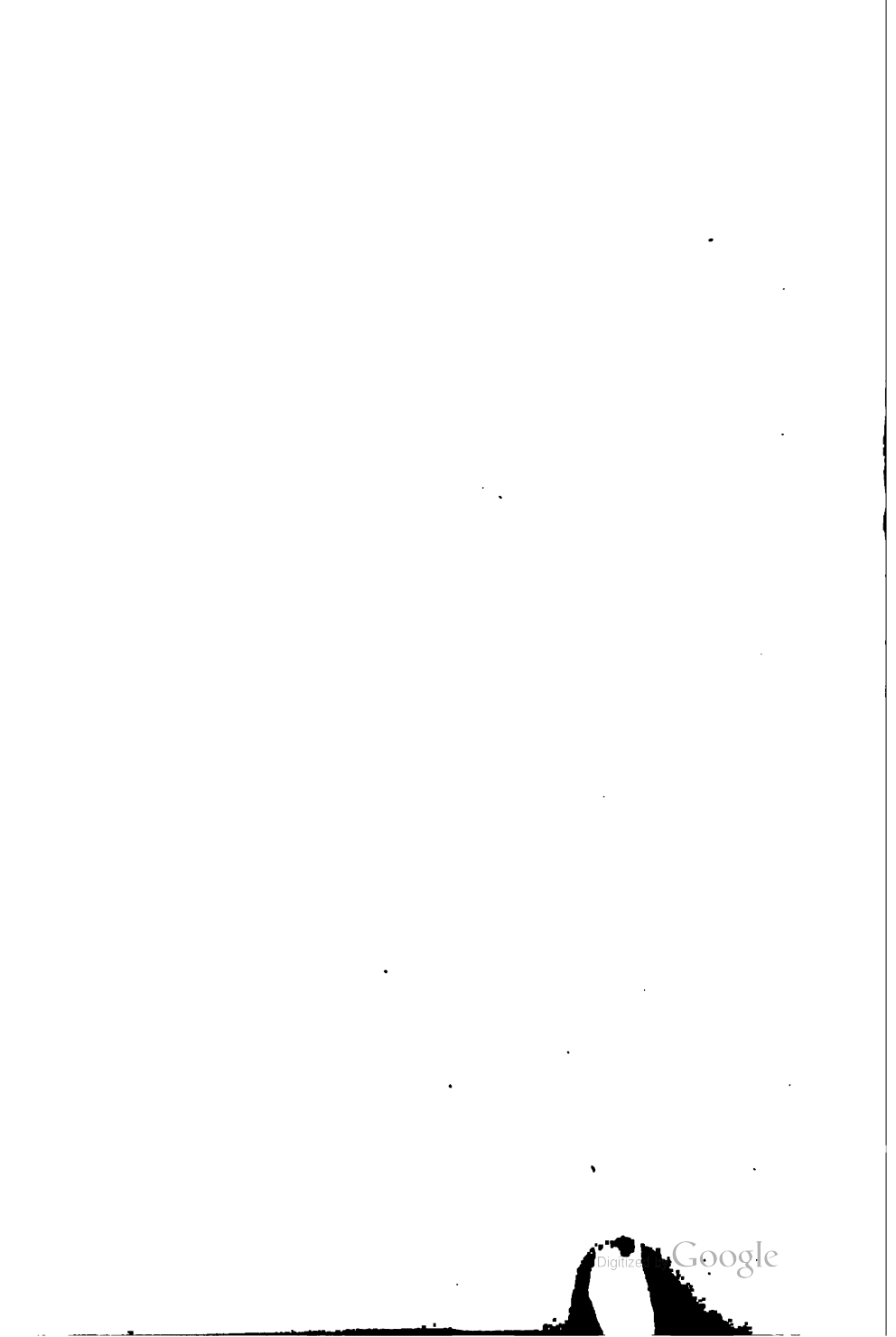
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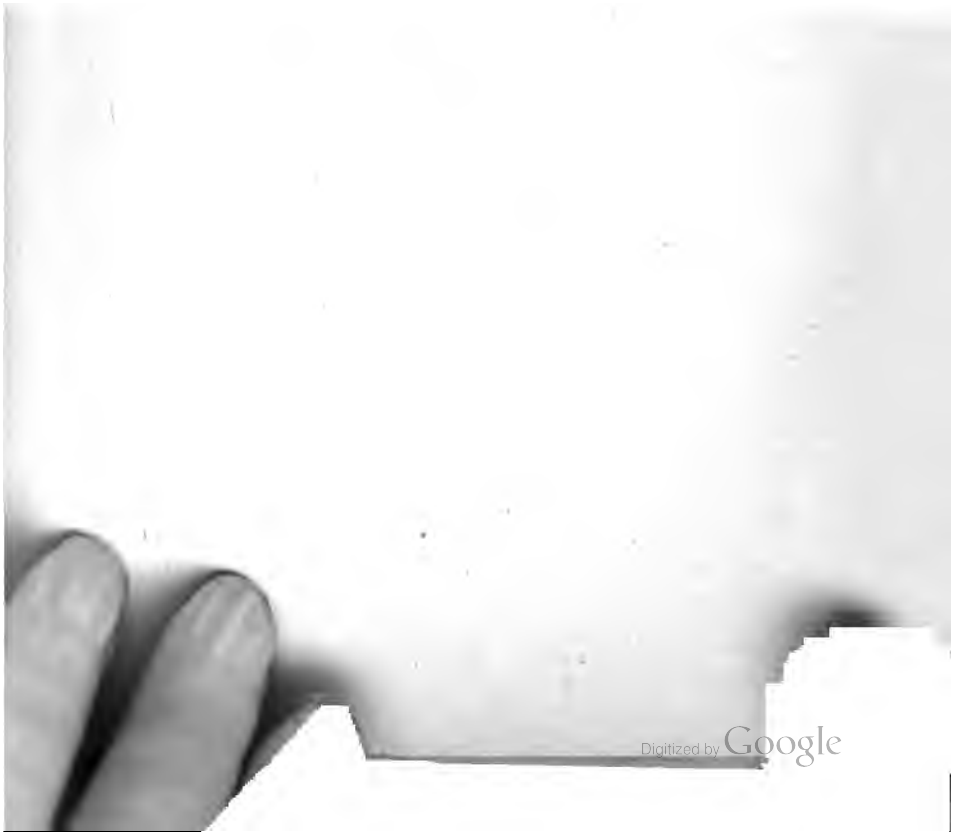
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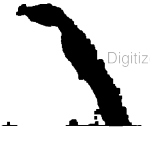

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